

PLACEBO EFFECT CANNOT EXPLAIN HEALING RESULTS

New study shows healing is scientifically proven and is as effective on seeds and cells as it is on humans

A LARGE proportion of the scientific and medical community dismiss healing and healers on the basis that patients' unexpected improvements and even cures are simply the result of the well-known "placebo" effect.

This phenomenon, in which a sick patient believes he or she is receiving effective medicine, treatment or surgery and responds accordingly, is real and common, and improvements *do* occur even though the medication is inert, the surgery is a sham or the patient is being lied to about the nature of the treatment.

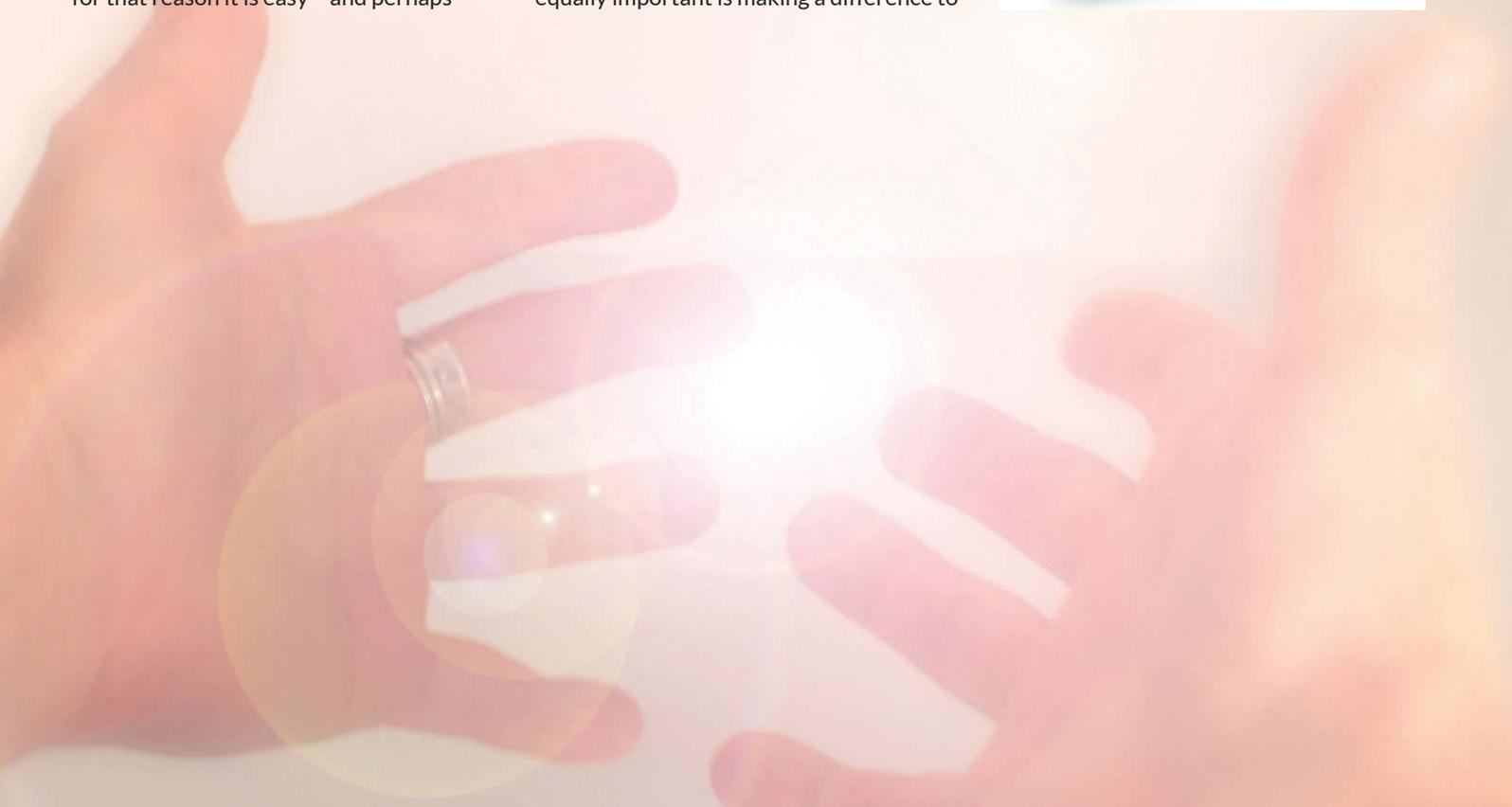
The placebo effect complicates assessments of new treatments because it has to be taken into account in assessing pharmaceutical test results.

It hinges on patient *expectation* and for that reason it is easy – and perhaps

understandable – that it is used by those who are sceptical of healing powers to explain away the positive results that are often achieved by healers and others who offer complementary and alternative approaches to medicine.

The sceptics could be right – to a degree. Many who consult healers will certainly have an expectation that the treatment they receive will bring about improvement. But could it be that, in addition to any self-induced placebo element that benefits them, something equally important is making a difference to

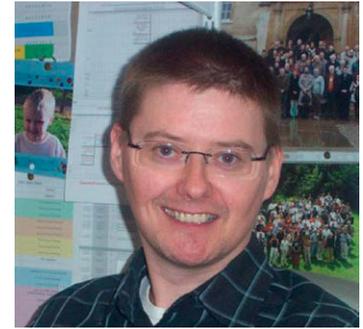
“ The placebo effect complicates assessments of new treatments ”



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Professor Chris Roe

their health?

The answer to that, say UK researchers who have reviewed the evidence, is a resounding “Yes”. But who or what is that mysterious “something else”?

If a patient visits a healer and then improves dramatically, can we be certain that it is the healer who should get the credit (assuming, for the moment, that any placebo effect makes a minimal contribution)? Could it be that the patient’s family or friends had also prayed for him or her, or sent their own distant healing thoughts, and that it was these actions which brought about the improvement, rather than the healer?

Such complexities make it difficult to say with certainty that a healer can take all the credit, and similar objections are raised in discussions about the efficacy of healing generally.

But Professor Chris Roe, Director of the Centre for the Study of Anomalous Psychological Processes at the University of Northampton, and fellow researchers Charmaine Sonnex and Elizabeth

Roxburgh, have risen to the challenge by focusing a new study on analyses of particular types of healing experiments.

They looked at research in which the healing interventions involved no contact with the human recipients, isolating 57 studies that satisfied their strict criteria.

They also did a similar state-of-the-art meta-analysis of 49 studies in which, rather than humans, the beneficiaries of non-contact or distant healing were biological systems, such as plants or cell and tissue cultures, that “presumably do not have expectancies about the effects of treatment or have communities of peers sending them positive intentions for their well-being”.

Their findings, revealed in “Two Meta-Analyses of Non-contact Healing Studies” published in *Explore* (Vol 11, No 1, Jan/Feb 2015), show that healing intent or energy channelling *does* produce positive results, including accelerating the germination of seeds and the enzymatic activity within cell cultures.

Commenting on the findings, Sue Knight, chief executive of the Confederation of Healing Organisations (CHO), which provided funding support for the research, said:

“The human trials showed that healing generated statistically significant positive outcomes. Humans aside: cells in a petri dish, animals and plants all showed a positive response to healing and indeed a highly statistically significant effect was seen. It’s impossible for cells, plants and animals to experience any kind of placebo effect, therefore this proved without doubt that healing can make a difference.”

Knight, a healing practitioner for 20 years, adds: “While results of the research are groundbreaking for healing, there is still much we do not know or understand. *Metaphysical reactions do not carry the same easily understood reactions as conventional medicine.*

“But what we do know now, in a scientifically demonstrable sense, is that healing intent is what made the difference. This healing intent was used

with all the research subjects forming part of the research. This is not new to holistic practitioners, but allows us to understand and impart on a greater level what contributes to positive results that can occur.”

A discussion paper on these findings, written by Paul Dieppe, Professor of Health and Wellbeing at the University of Exeter Medical School, Devon, and Professor Chris Roe, the lead researcher of the meta-analyses, was published in the British Holistic Medical Association’s *Journal of Holistic Healthcare* (Issue 12.1, Spring 2015).

Under the title “Is Healing an Option to Aid Sustainable Healthcare Futures?” they observe: “The overall results of this meta-analysis suggest that non-contact healing results in relatively small, but highly statistically significant effects on non-human targets as well as on humans. Indeed, both the effect size and statistical assurance were slightly greater in some of the non-human systems than they were for humans.”

And they conclude that “the data clearly indicate that non-contact healing intention can result in beneficial outcomes on both human and non-human targets”.

The same authors also contributed a very positive Editorial in the *International Journal of Nursing Studies* 52 (2015), making the point that healing intent is not confined to healers:

“It seems likely that the positive intention of one person to help another person (or another living organism) to improve is the key to success, as this is an aspect of healing that is stressed by many healers, including nurses who practise therapeutic touch.”

It is to be hoped that the Northampton study will encourage even greater scientific scrutiny of healing energy and a broader acceptance that healing intent could be an even more powerful well-being mechanism than the placebo effect. ■



Sue Knight, chief executive of The Confederation of Healing Organisations